General Assembly

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Agenda item 108

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly

[*without reference to a Main Committee (A/56/L.27 and Add.1)*]

56/38. Recommendations on support for volunteering

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, in which it proclaimed the year 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers, based on Economic and Social Council resolution 1997/44 of 22 July 1997, and its resolution 55/57 of 4 December 2000, in which it requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report on ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering, and bearing in mind Commission for Social Development resolution 39/2 of 23 February 2001,[1]

Recalling also the outcome document of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world",[2] in which the General Assembly recommended the promotion of the involvement of volunteers in social development, inter alia, by encouraging Governments, taking into account the views of all actors, to develop comprehensive strategies and programmes by raising public awareness about the value and opportunities of volunteerism and by facilitating an enabling environment for individuals and other actors of civil society to engage in voluntary activities, and the private sector to support such activities,

Recalling further paragraphs 73 and 179 (*f*) of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women,[3] paragraph 42 of the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium adopted at the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in June 2001,[4] and paragraphs 32 (i) (*b*) and 41 (ii) (*a*) of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001–

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 6* and corrigendum (E/2001/26 and Corr.1), chap. I, sect. E.
[2] See resolution S-24/2, annex.
[3] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[4] See resolution S-25/2, annex.

2010 adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in May 2001,[5]

Recognizing the valuable contribution of volunteering, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, to economic and social development, benefiting society at large, communities and the individual volunteer,

Recognizing also that volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination,

Recognizing further the existing contribution of the organizations of the United Nations system to supporting volunteering, including the work of United Nations Volunteers around the world, by promoting volunteerism, including by placing volunteers,

Aware of the need to approach voluntary activities strategically as a means of enhancing resources, addressing global issues and improving the quality of life for everyone,

1. *Welcomes* the report of the Secretary-General on support for volunteering;[6]

2. *Also welcomes* the work of the United Nations Volunteers as the focal point for the International Year of Volunteers in supporting national International Year of Volunteers committees and in collecting and disseminating information on the Year, including through its web site;[7]

3. *Expresses its appreciation* regarding the support to the International Year of Volunteers extended by States, international organizations and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, especially at the local, national and regional levels;

4. *Commends* the ongoing contributions of all volunteers to society, including in extraordinary conditions such as disasters;

5. *Encourages* all people to become more engaged in voluntary activities;

6. *Lays down* in the annex to the present resolution the recommendations on ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take specific measures, in particular within the mandates of the United Nations Volunteers and the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat, to disseminate widely the present resolution and the annex;

8. *Calls upon* all Governments and organizations of the United Nations system to give these recommendations due consideration;

9. *Decides* that on 5 December 2002, International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development, two plenary meetings at the fifty-seventh

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[5] A/CONF.191/11.
[6] A/56/288.
[7] www.iyv2001.org.

session of the General Assembly shall be devoted to the outcome of the International Year of Volunteers and its follow-up under the agenda item entitled "Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family";

10. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the outcome of the International Year of Volunteers and its follow up, to include proposals for an integrated and coordinated follow-up, to be pursued in the relevant parts of the United Nations system, as well as on cross-cutting issues, building on his report to the Assembly at the present session and taking into account the present resolution, the discussions held during the present session and other relevant contributions.

76th plenary meeting
5 December 2001

Annex

Recommendations on ways in which Governments and the United Nations system could support volunteering

I. General considerations

1. In these recommendations, the terms volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor.

2. Actions by Governments and the United Nations system are mutually reinforcing but are treated separately below for the sake of clarity.

3. There is not one universal model of best practice, since what works well in one country may not work in another with very different cultures and traditions.

4. Support for voluntary activities does not imply support for government downsizing or for replacing paid employment.

5. It is not just targeted measures that have an impact on volunteering; general social and economic policy measures can also influence citizens' opportunities and willingness to volunteer.

6. Neglecting to factor volunteering into the design and implementation of policies could entail the risk of overlooking a valuable asset and undermine traditions of cooperation that bind communities together.

7. It is important to ensure that opportunities for volunteering in all sectors are open both to women and men, given their different levels of participation in different areas, and recognizing the potential positive effect of volunteering on the empowerment of women.

II. Government support

1. It is recommended that Governments further support voluntary activities by creating a favourable environment, including through the following policies and measures, and taking into account the local cultural context.

(a) Increasing public awareness of the vital contribution of volunteerism to the social and economic functioning of their communities through, inter alia, public information activities and public events

(i) Highlight the contribution of volunteering; organize briefings and seminars for policy makers and the media. Official papers on the status of volunteering and the issues that need to be addressed can be published and widely disseminated. High-profile events and campaigns can be organized on national days and on International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development on 5 December. Negative stereotyping of volunteers can be challenged. The promotion of volunteering can be achieved through special programmes and public service announcements or by joint initiatives such as award schemes;

(ii) Encourage the media to play a supportive role in public awareness-raising activities;

(iii) Disseminate the results of studies and surveys on the contribution of volunteerism, where they exist, through the media, schools, non-governmental organizations and other channels.

(b) Taking general measures concerning encouragement and facilitation, preparation, training and recognition of volunteers

(i) Provide, in a way complementary to the support from other sources, an adequate human and physical infrastructure for volunteering. This could include, inter alia, awareness-raising campaigns, development of a volunteer centre infrastructure, establishment of focal points or the use of pilot schemes and the promotion of online volunteering. Specific campaigns in the area of, for example, mass immunization, literacy, or low-cost housing, could include budgetary provision for the encouragement and facilitation, orientation and training, monitoring and recognition of volunteers;

(ii) Facilitate the establishment and functioning of volunteer centres, which provide a valuable stimulus to formal service volunteering through advocacy, monitoring and encouraging new initiatives. National volunteer centres provide effective leadership in the formal volunteer movement, while regional and local centres ensure linkages with the grass-roots communities and organizations. Legal and fiscal frameworks are important factors in the sustainability of such centres and financial support may also be desirable;

(iii) Provide or facilitate specialized training and the formation of professional volunteer managers and trainers in the area of formal service volunteering, including by introducing formal credentials and standards;

(iv) Encourage public sector workers to volunteer, for instance by facilitating measures, recognition, career enhancement incentives and the establishment of a dedicated special unit. This sets a positive example for society and helps to strengthen the sense of collective responsibility.

(c) Enabling fiscal, legislative and other frameworks, including for community-based organizations and not-for-profit organizations engaged in volunteering

(i) Introduce enabling legislation. The goal is to encourage or inspire citizens to volunteer but allow the choice to rest with the individual or organization; it can also facilitate employee volunteering. It can provide tax

incentives and subsidies for organizations, as well as coverage and protection against risks, in a way fitting the particular society;

(ii) Facilitate partnership-building around volunteer-based activities of civil society, including arrangements for joint planning, implementation and monitoring. This could incorporate employee volunteer activities of the private sector.

(d) Encouraging and undertaking research in the various aspects of volunteerism and its impact on society

(i) Ensure that consideration of the issues regarding volunteering is based on a sound appreciation and analysis of the parameters, profile and trends of volunteering in the particular country context. Studies on volunteering can be undertaken by independent public policy research and/or academic institutions. Governments can also initiate research themselves, in partnership with other stakeholders;

(ii) Establish the economic value of volunteering to help to highlight one important aspect of its overall contribution to society and thereby assist in the development of informed policies which take into account the different levels of participation of women and men, youth and older people in different fields of volunteering.

(e) Ensuring citizens' access to information on opportunities for volunteering

(i) Facilitate the establishment of national databases on volunteer opportunities in collaboration with community-based organizations and not-for-profit organizations;

(ii) Disseminate information through the media, schools, and other channels with particular attention given to ensuring that information is accessible also to disadvantaged segments of the population. Encourage media companies to support and expand the concept of pro bono public service announcements on behalf of volunteer-based organizations and activities.

(f) Addressing the possible impact of general social and economic policy measures upon citizens' opportunities and willingness to volunteer

(i) Take into account the possible impact of general social and economic policy upon citizens' opportunities to volunteer. Such a "volunteer check" could pertain to measures related to labour, for example, such as the length of the work week and the age of retirement, which have an impact on the profile of volunteering. Legal and fiscal measures could also be reviewed to assess whether they impinge negatively on the status of volunteer-involving organizations, including issues related to juridical status, rights to associational activities, and resource mobilization. Subsequently, legal and administrative hindrances to volunteering, where they exist, can be reduced;

(ii) Give due weight to local ownership and citizen participation, to bring public services closer to communities and to open space for greater citizen engagement expressed through channels such as parental involvement in schools and community involvement in natural resource management;

(iii) Recognize that transport, communication and other infrastructure, such as public spaces, enhance the capacity of people to organize for voluntary activities. This is especially true of geographically dispersed populations and

of people living in poverty, as well as older persons and people with disabilities. It is desirable that the impact of such infrastructure on levels of volunteering be factored into the planning process.

(g) Integrating volunteerism into national development planning, recognizing the potential contribution of volunteerism to the achievement of sustainable development goals

(i) Extend the notion of volunteerism as an additional valuable component of national development planning to development cooperation policy. Recognizing and building strategically on rich, local traditions of voluntary self-help and mutual aid can open the way to building up a new constituency in support of development efforts. Forging a link in the mind of the general public in countries providing development assistance between domestic volunteering in those countries and volunteering in countries receiving assistance can also help enlist public support for development cooperation.

(h) Participation of all population groups

(i) Consider all means available for more people to become involved in voluntary activities and to be drawn from a broader cross-section of society, including youth, older persons and people with disabilities and persons belonging to minorities, targeting opportunities for voluntary activities to facilitate the active participation of those groups which have little or no access to the benefits of engaging in volunteering;

(ii) Promote volunteering within educational establishments and youth services; develop specific programmes to encourage youth volunteering; put in place systems to recognize and accredit volunteering by youth; and work with the media to present an attractive image of volunteering. This can have a significant impact on the level of youth participation and constitute a sound investment in a country's human resources.

III. Support by the United Nations system

1. It is recommended that the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, further support voluntary activities by creating a favourable environment, including through:

(a) Awareness-raising

(i) Raise awareness internally and with their partners as regards the role of volunteerism in the various areas in which they are active and can sensitize their constituencies as to the implications in terms of activities undertaken. At the political level, strategically manage and support volunteering and incorporate it into the agenda of their meetings;

(ii) Undertake research and disseminate information about the cross-cutting link between volunteerism and major global concerns, including through technical and popular publications, workshops and Internet sites. This would serve also to extend recognition to volunteers and their organizations, which could be complemented by awards and other measures, including raising the profile of International Volunteer Day.

(b) Recognition of the contributions of volunteers

(i) Enhance and expand the current practice of extending special recognition to volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations across the United Nations system.

(c) Involving volunteers in their programmes, interlinking with national initiatives

(i) Include volunteers in their activities, supporting, inter alia, the establishment of volunteer schemes to address a range of global concerns. Where they exist, national and local volunteer centres could benefit substantially from the specialized expertise and networks of the United Nations system;

(ii) Actively encourage staff of the United Nations system to volunteer, utilizing their special skills and experiences.

(d) Long-term planning for the enhancement of social capital by including all segments of society in volunteering

(i) Make a strategic choice for the involvement of all segments of society, including youth, older persons and people with disabilities and persons belonging to minorities, targeting opportunities for voluntary activities to facilitate the participation of those groups that have little or no access to the benefits of engaging in volunteering. In this way, building on societal norms and networks will enhance the social capital of the society concerned, strengthen its capacity for development and have a lasting impact on its well-being.

(e) Assisting in building national capacities, including in the field of training

(i) Assist countries, upon request, in building national capacities, including in the field of training, and further support Governments in their actions to promote volunteerism as a strategic tool to enhance economic and social development;

(ii) Recognize the continuing role of the United Nations Volunteers as the volunteer arm of the United Nations system, placing volunteers in development and humanitarian programmes and promoting online volunteering. Build on the acquired experience of the United Nations Volunteers in enhancing the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteering, deriving from its role as focal point for the International Year of Volunteers.